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Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs

Chairman Tierney Comments on Release of the Washington Office on Latin America's Development First Report

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Rep. John F. Tierney (D-Mass.), Chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, kicked off a Capitol Hill briefing organized by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) in cooperation with Senator Bob Menendez, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on International Development, to examine ways to curb the growing of coca and opium poppies in the Andes and Afghanistan.

Alternative livelihood strategies, meant to displace the growing of illicit crops with licit ones, stretch back at least to the 1980s. According to today's panelists, exactly what approaches work best on the ground are little understood. The U.S. government spent an estimated \$320 million dollars on alternative livelihoods programs in 2009 alone. The briefing coincided with the release of WOLA's report called Development First which highlights lessons learned in promoting rural development to reduce illicit crop growing.

The report offers ten lessons learned for promoting alternative livelihoods that include: ensuring effective governance and rule of law are firmly in place before getting started, treating farmers as partners in development not as criminals, respecting local culture and traditions, not imposing aid donor attitudes and values towards illicit crop growing, curbing violent local conflict before beginning, and making crop eradication the last, not the first, method of choice. The most important lesson, according to the report, is to avoid making donor aid contingent on the prior elimination of illicit crops.

A full copy of the Chairman's statement on this matter is below:

When it comes to counternarcotics strategies currently in place in the Andes and Afghanistan, I'm far from convinced that U.S. government efforts are benefiting from the best and latest thinking and practices using alternative livelihood approaches.

Drug eradication programs overseas – which have had questionable results in many countries – are currently out of favor among some practitioners and policy-makers, while alternative livelihood programs, we are told, are on the ascendency. Today's findings from a panel of world experts question whether we are using the right approaches in the Andes and Afghanistan.

Some experts point to the almost total elimination of opium poppy in Thailand as the pre-eminent success story for alternative livelihoods programs. The approach involved combining crop replacement, rural integration, and alternative development approaches over a 30-year period with the unwavering support of the Thai Government. I'm doubtful that we are prepared, resourced and committed to do this in Afghanistan.

The Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, which I chair, held a hearing in October with leading experts on the threats posed by transnational drug enterprises. We touched on the importance of alternative livelihoods approaches as a tool for curbing the growing of illicit drugs. We plan to hold a second hearing on U.S. government programs to curb transnational drugs enterprises, with witnesses from the Drug Enforcement Agency, the White House Office on National Drug Control Policy, the State Department, and the Treasury, to get their views of the success of U.S. approaches. Today's discussion will help us get down to the facts at that upcoming hearing.